

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A system for creating and distributing a series of individualized multimedia messages over a computer network to a plurality of recipients, comprising:

5 (a) a recipient information repository;

(b) a multimedia content repository; and

(c) means for creating and delivering individualized multimedia content over said network to each of the plurality of recipients, wherein said multimedia content is assembled from selected elements within the multimedia content repository which are selected in response to information about each of said recipients whose information is extracted from the recipient information repository.

2. A system as recited in claim 1, wherein the means for creating and delivering customized multimedia content over said network comprises a computer operatively coupled to said network and executing a programmed sequence of instructions which assemble multimedia segments from the multimedia content repository as selected according to information about one of said recipients, as extracted from said recipient information repository, into a multimedia stream delivered to said recipient.

20 3. A system for creating and delivering a series of individualized multimedia messages over a computer network, comprising:

means for accessing information about an intended recipient;

means for personalizing a multimedia message for the intended recipient based upon information about a particular intended recipient; and

means for delivering the multimedia message to the intended recipient.

5

4. A system as recited in claim 3, wherein the means for accessing information about an intended recipient comprises a data access routine within a programmed set of instructions being executed within a computer, the data access routine capable of manipulating a database, local or remote, to extract information about a recipient.

5. A system as recited in claim 4, further comprising an administration routine that monitors and facilitates the creation of multimedia content within a multimedia campaign and includes routines for viewing/playing content, uploading content, searching content, and organizing multimedia content.

6. A system as recited in claim 5, wherein the administration routines are configured to create and maintain database and directory structures.

7. A system as recited in claim 5, further comprising file conversion routines which are capable of converting file formats within the system and for delivery to clients.

8. A system as recited in claim 5, further comprising a clean up routine which provides selective clean up of a recipient database by removing errors and unwanted redundancies.

5 9. A system as recited in claim 5, further comprising an archiving routine that saves files and associations within a particular campaign into an archive from which the campaign may be later restored and executed.

10. A system as recited in claim 3, wherein the means for personalizing the multimedia message for the intended recipient comprises a multimedia engine routine within a programmed set of instructions being executed within a computer, the multimedia engine routine capable of assembling multimedia elements from a content database into a multimedia message in response to information about the intended recipient.

11. A system as recited in claim 3, wherein the means for delivering individualized multimedia message content to the intended recipients, is comprising a delivery routine within a programmed set of instructions being executed within a computer that is operatively connected to a computer network, the delivery routine
20 capable of formatting the individualized multimedia message content for the intended recipient and the subsequent delivery of the individualized multimedia message over the network for the intended recipient, wherein the message for the intended recipient may

be delivered directly to the recipient, or delivered indirectly through one or more systems which direct the individualized multimedia message to the recipient.

12. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the individualized multimedia message is delivered to each of the recipients as an email message which includes multimedia content in a format selected from the group of multimedia formats consisting of Flash™, Real Audio™, Quick Time™, Windows MP™, SWF, SWT, Java™, HTML/Embedded, animated GIF, and 3D™.

13. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the formatted individualized multimedia message is delivered to the recipient as an email message that plays automatically when the recipient clicks on the message.

14. A system as recited in claim 13, wherein the individualized multimedia message is delivered to the recipient, comprising markup language coding into which multimedia elements are operatively linked to play as the markup language is executed.

15. A system as recited in claim 13, wherein the markup language coding is selected from the group of markup languages consisting of SGML, XML, and HTML.

16. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the individualized multimedia message is formatted for delivery to the recipient as an email message containing a

unique URL link that when activated retrieves the individualized multimedia message content.

17. A system as recited in claim 16, wherein the activation of the unique URL link comprises execution of a first routine to collect individualized data and a second routine to display the individualized multimedia message content.

18. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the individualized multimedia message is formatted for downloading to the recipient as a monolithic file, such as Flash™, Real Audio™, Quick Time™, Windows MP™, SWF, SWT, Java™, HTML/Embedded, animated GIF, 3D™, MPEG, MP4, or JPEG file, that may be either viewed or played by the recipient utilizing conventional players or viewers to access the message.

19. A system as recited in claim 11, wherein the individualized multimedia message may be converted to a format compatible with a graphic printer, such that individualized graphic output may be generated.

20. A system for creating and distributing individualized multimedia messages over a computer network, comprising:

(a) a computer operatively connected to said network and executing a programmed sequence of instructions;

(b) a recipient information access routine within said programmed sequence of instructions which is capable of accessing data about a given intended recipient;

(c) a content repository containing multimedia elements that may be combined to form individualized messages;

5 (d) a content management routine within said programmed sequence of instructions which is capable of retrieving selected multimedia content from the content repository, wherein the process of selecting multimedia content is responsive to information content regarding the given recipient accessed by the recipient information access routine;

(e) a multimedia engine routine within said programmed sequence of instructions which packages the multimedia content as an individualized message for delivery to the given recipient; and

(f) a delivery routine within said programmed sequence of instructions which delivers the individualized message to the given recipient.

21. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the content repository comprises a structured database having a directory hierarchy.

22. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the recipient information is
20 accessed within said programmed sequence of instructions using SQL, ASP and XML.

23. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the delivery routine is configured to deliver the multimedia message through a network for receipt on a media selected from the group of media consisting of email, WAP enabled devices, wireless devices, interactive TV, media files, and printed media.

5

24. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the delivery routine prepares the multimedia content for delivery in a specific delivery format.

25. A system as recited in claim 24, wherein the delivery routine further comprises synchronization routines to synchronize different multimedia streams, such as the synchronization of audio and video streams.

26. A system as recited in claim 24, wherein the delivery format provides a mechanism for servicing data queries.

27. A system as recited in claim 24, wherein the specific delivery format is selected from the group of delivery formats consisting of: Flash™, Real Audio™, Quick Time™, Windows MP™, SWF, SWT, Java™, HTML/Embedded, animated GIF, 3D™, and wireless.

20

28. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the delivery format is capable of being converted for output to a printer so that the individualized multimedia message

may be printed out as individualized graphics and text on a printing device.

29. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the recipient information is extracted from a client database

5

30. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the multimedia messaging system is directly interfaced to the client system with a data exchange protocol through which the recipient information may be extracted.

31. A system as recited in claim 30, wherein the exchange protocol utilized is selected from a group of exchange protocols consisting of ODBC, and XML.

32. A system as recited in claim 30, wherein a custom interface is created for interfacing the multimedia messaging system with the client database.

33. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the information about the intended recipient comprises a user name and an associated email address, so that the multimedia content may be customized with the user name and delivered to the email address of the recipient which is associated with the user name.

20

34. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the delivery routine is configured to deliver the multimedia content to the intended recipient as an email message through

a client routine that is supplied with data comprising the recipient's name, email address and a unique URL pointing to the message content, wherein the client routine is then capable of deploying the email message with the URL.

5 35. A system as recited in claim 34, wherein the delivery routine is further configured to deliver the multimedia content to play spontaneously when highlighted within the recipient's email in-box.

36. A system as recited in claim 35, wherein the email messages are deployed within an email campaign, said email campaign comprising a content database, and a list of recipients with associated personalization information.

37. A system as recited in claim 36, further comprising an archiving routine which is capable of storing and retrieving email campaigns.

38. A system as recited in claim 37, wherein the archiving routine is capable of storing all files and structures relating to a specific campaign, such that a completed campaign that has been archived may later be restored for further development or use.

20 39. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the client interface of the content management routine comprises a graphical user interface which displays information and allows for direct client input.

40. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the content management routine further comprises routines for directing content uploading, and the customization of the content database.

5

41. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the content management routine further comprises routines for providing file security for a campaign which restricts non-authorized parties from accessing a client campaign.

42. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the content management routine further comprises a comprehensive search engine for use on the content repository.

43. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the search engine further comprises a Thesaurus that is capable of looking up files in response to a set of keywords.

44. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the content management routine further comprises version control routines for managing file check-in and check-out by clients accessing the system.

20

45. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein each of the elements of content being uploaded is represented on a screen and each element may be labeled by the client.

5 46. A system as recited in claim 44, wherein labeling of a content element comprises adding a filename, description, and a keyword list.

47. A system as recited in claim 20, further comprising a reporting routine capable of real-time reporting of content and usage statistics.

48. A system as recited in claim 47, wherein the reporting routine is capable of providing information on click-rate, click-tracking, sales, customer profiles, and use patterns.

49. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the multimedia content comprises graphics, animations, audio, and text which are utilized singly or in combinations thereof.

50. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the content management routine further comprises the ability to synchronize combinations of graphics, audio, and text for presentation to the given recipient.

51. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the multimedia engine routine further comprises a routine capable of modifying the individualized message content, such as the offer, discount, coupon, or rebate, after the campaign has been deployed, wherein individualized messages viewed or played after the modification will reflect the modifications.

52. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the delivery routine further comprises a routine for collecting delivery and personal information about an additional recipient wherein the message may be re-individualized and delivered as word-of-mouth style advertising to the additional recipient.

53. A system as recited in claim 52, wherein the routine for collecting the delivery and personal information further collects optional information from the original recipient, such as recommendations, and an improved subject line.

54. A system as recited in claim 20, wherein the packaged multimedia content is delivered to the given recipient within an email message.

55. A method of creating and distributing individualized multimedia messages over a computer network, comprising:

retrieving information about an intended message recipient from a recipient database;

personalizing a multimedia message for said recipient based on the retrieved information; and

delivering the multimedia message to said recipient.

5 56. A method as recited in claim 55, wherein the information about the intended recipient comprises a user name and an associated email address.

57. A method as recited in claim 55, wherein the individualized multimedia message is assembled from multimedia segments which are selectably extracted from a content database.

58. A method as recited in claim 55, further comprising providing the client with the ability to upload, search, and manage the multimedia content contained within the content database.

59. A method as recited in claim 55, further comprising providing the ability to archive email campaigns, which can later be restored for additional development or deployment.

20 60. A method as recited in claim 55, wherein the delivery of the multimedia message to said recipient is performed by sending emails to the recipients, wherein a unique URL is embedded in each email which points to stored message content,

wherein upon the client opening the email the URL is activated and the individualized multimedia message is played for the client.

61. A method as recited in claim 60, wherein the email is delivered in a format
5 capable of playing spontaneously when the email message is highlighted in the recipient's in-box or selected for opening.

62. A method as recited in claim 55, wherein the delivery of the multimedia message to said recipient is performed by providing the client with the recipient's name, email address and a unique URL pointing to the message content, wherein the client then deploys the email message with the URL.

63. A method as recited in claim 55, further comprising providing a database structure and directory structure for retrieving and processing multimedia files to be used in an email campaign.

64. A method of collecting revenue from clients for development and delivery of individualized multimedia streams on a multimedia messaging system, wherein the multimedia streams are embedded in email messages sent to recipients within the
20 client's advertising campaign, comprising:

charging a fee to the client for each individualized multimedia stream delivered to one of said recipients, such that the client is not charged for emails containing an

individualized multimedia stream which have been sent but are not opened up by a recipient.

65. A method as recited in claim 64, further comprising charging a client fee
5 for allowing the client to utilize the multimedia messaging system to develop the multimedia streams and associated advertising campaign.

66. A method as recited in claim 64, wherein the client fee is charged for developing smaller campaigns that do not exceed a predetermined size.

67. A method as recited in claim 64, wherein the client fee is determined by the amount of time the client utilizes the multimedia messaging system for developing the campaign.

68. A method as recited in claim 64, wherein the client fee is determined by the complexity of the multimedia streams being created.

69. A method as recited in claim 64, wherein the complexity of the multimedia stream being embedded within each email message is determined by a set of message
20 metrics selected from the group of message metrics consisting of: number of elements, media type, stream length, disk storage requirements, and the use of special services such as synchronization of media element.

70. A method as recited in claim 64, further including hourly consultation charges when personal service is required by the client in developing the campaign.

004047-9630260